

Pearson Edexcel

A-LEVEL



COURSEWORK WORKBOOK

Geography

Non-exam assessment:
Independent Investigation

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03	1.1	How to use this book
04	1.2	The enquiry process and key questions answered
07	1.3	Demystifying the Pearson Edexcel NEA mark scheme

13	2.1	Choosing a topic and focus
15	2.2	Initial background research
17	2.3	Generating a title and developing aims, questions or hypotheses
19	2.4	Independent investigation proposal form: initial draft

- 21 **3.1** Understanding the different types of research and literature sources
- 23 **3.2** Evaluating the reliability and provenance of different sources
- 25 **3.3** Literature review 1: using sources to find a model, idea or concept
- 27 **3.4** Literature review 2: researching fieldwork design and 'reviewing the review'
- 29 **3.5** Using other (experimental) data from research and literature sources

31 **4.1** Choosing a design: sampling, sample size and a management scale
34 **4.2** Recommending the pilot study
35 **4.3** Quantitative and qualitative fieldwork data and information

38	5.1	Introduction to writing up
41	5.2	Developing an appropriate writing style: avoiding narrative and description
43	5.3	Writing the purpose of the independent investigation
45	5.4	Demonstrating appropriate field methodologies and data collection
47	5.5	Evaluating design and fieldwork methodologies
50	5.6	Data representation
53	5.7	Data analysis and interpretation
56	5.8	Making links and connections, and keeping to the word limit
59	5.9	Writing conclusions
61	5.10	Writing a critical evaluation: reliability and validity
63	5.11	Consideration of the ethical dimension of field research
65	5.12	Reviewing example coursework extracts and thinking about an abstract

69 Research skills and plagiarism

73 Research logs

79 Glossary

Section 2 Making a start

2.1 Choosing a topic and focus

The topic for your NEA must be your own choice. You must come up with the idea and focus independently. It's an important part of your A-level Geography, remember that it's worth nearly 20 per cent, so the topic does need some thought.

Ideally, and in no particular order:

It should be interesting

As it's worth 70 marks overall (that's the same as Paper 3), you really need to be thinking of spending perhaps 30–40 hours writing up after you have completed your fieldwork. That will of course be something that your teacher or tutor will advise you on. Given the amount of time you will need to spend on it, it's important to find a topic that interests you:

- It might be something or somewhere you have studied before, but it is likely you will need to go into greater depth or complexity or approach it from a different perspective.
- It might be something you have seen or read about and want to find out more about.
- It might be something that affects your family or the local community and is causing controversy.
- It might touch on other areas of your study or hobbies that you enjoy such as art, music, photography, business, sport and economics.
- It might be a chance to do something contemporary, for example using social media or blogging to approach a socially-derived idea.
- It might be something to show university admissions tutors that you are interested in different aspects of the subject and are not afraid of tackling new topics.
- It might be that you like a familiar topic or environment, but are prepared to look at it with a fresh pair of eyes or using a different methodology, for example.

It should be manageable and deliver the requirements of the mark scheme

- It shouldn't be such a big topic that you can't really control either the research or fieldwork.

- It should be based at a spatial scale that is both manageable (usually small-scale) and appropriate to the topic.
- It should be a topic that allows you to find a range of readily accessible primary and secondary data/information which allows you to reach a substantiated **conclusion**.
- It should be planned so that the area being investigated is both accessible and safe to work in.

It should be geographical

- The topic should allow you to challenge a concept, model, theory, idea or even an assumption or belief.
- It should be on a topic which can be identified within the specification (you will have to show this on the independent investigation proposal form – see page 18).
- It can be based on a topic which spans several areas of the specification.
- It should allow you to link to a 'bigger picture' idea or wider physical or human system.

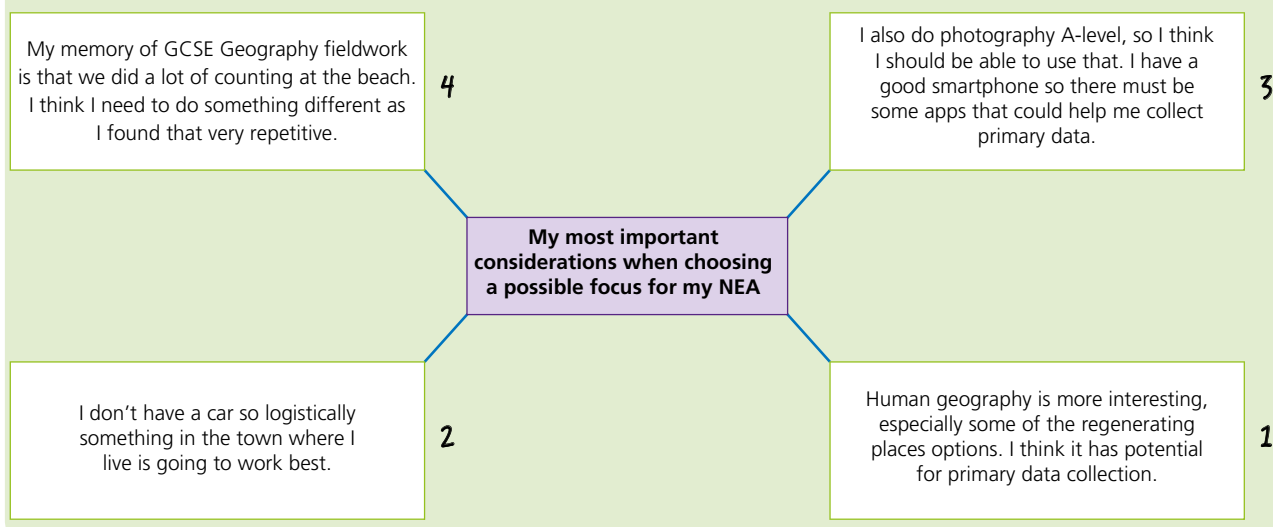
It should be answerable

- It should be a topic or idea that is likely to be answerable within the recommended 3000–4000 words.
- It might be that you don't know the answer before you start, or that the answer at the end is not the one that is expected.
- It should be a topic that allows you to reach conclusions that might be partial, tentative or even incomplete.
- However, it should not be answerable with a simple 'yes' or 'no'.
- It should also avoid a truism, for example 'Does the pedestrian flow increase towards the centre of the town?'

Mind map

Here is an example of a mind map created by a student who is considering the focus of their NEA. They have thought about their own skills and talents as well as priorities when considering

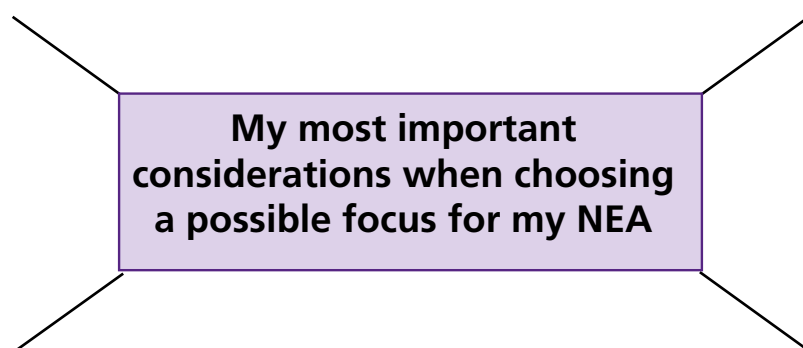
a possible idea and topic for their investigation. They have begun by writing them down in a mind map and have gone on to number them to create a rank order of importance.



My progress

Use the model above to set out your own priorities. Start by thinking of factors that are important for you.

Some important considerations for me are:



Now number them in order of importance to you.

Copyright: Sample material

2.2 Initial background research

By this point you may have a very broad and non-specific idea of an area of geography that you might want to begin to investigate. You are unlikely to know at this point, however, where to, or even how to, approach the investigation. So, the initial background research you need to do at this point may serve several overlapping objectives:

- To read-up about sources of ideas that can be developed into a more appropriate focus.
- To establish what research and information might be available on particular topics.
- To get an idea around a topic or concept that links to the specification.
- To find out more about a local area and topical issues.
- To find out how a possible idea might link to a wider topic or system.

It is important to make notes or take photographs of sources used at this point so that you can begin to compile a list of references. At this stage it doesn't need to be formalised; instead, just keep a record that you can use later to complete a more finalised bibliography.

Where to look

We will cover more about the literature research and review as well as sources of information in Section 3, page 20. However, at this point in the enquiry process there are likely to be a few avenues for the initial research that you might explore.

Local newspapers and forums

These are good starting points especially for thinking about local issues (or conflicting views) in an area.

Technical reports

These are available on the internet often as pdf files, but can be very useful if they match your topic area. Good for concepts and ideas.

Magazines

Publications such as *Geography Review* and *GeoFactsheet* have searchable archives. These may provide ideas for manageable questions.

Importantly, such sources may give you initial ideas around a concept or question, as well as a starting point with regard to data collection approaches. Your textbook and school notes will also provide some information, but be aware that these will be generalised and may not help you with creating a specific focus at this stage. They will also lack any local dimension.

Different reading methods

It is often said that you should begin your research by reading and this is certainly good advice. However, at this stage in the enquiry process you are likely to need to be either skimming or scanning to cover quite a large amount of material:

- Skimming – basic quick reading to determine the quality of the information.
- scanning – quick reading to locate key words or phrases.

This may be from sources that you have found online, or printed copies of information that are available in a library. If possible, use key words and tags to locate the information quickly. Again, you are reminded to keep a record of any sources.

Keeping up to date – local sources of information

Wherever you intend to undertake your independent investigation it is important to 'connect' the geography at a local scale. In other words, to look for a local angle (perhaps a local issue related to planning, pollution, traffic, the high street, coastal erosion, and so on). It is often called a 'local media scan'. Local issues can of course be both physical and/or human topics.

Figure 3 includes some examples of local online sources that might help to create an idea around affordable housing, changing communities and gentrification.

Exciting times ahead for Lewisham with proposed tube line extension?

Plans to extend the Bakerloo line could regenerate Lewisham as the extended East London line did Hoxton and Dalston. As Lewisham currently relies on buses and over ground trains, extending the tube

could vastly improve local transport. The news has already triggered large investment in the area by housebuilders.

Transport for London says the project, supported by Mayor Sadiq Khan, will cost £3.6 billion. If approved, it could start in 2023 and services should start running by 2028.

'Rapid Gentrification' cause of Lewisham residents' disposable incomes rising fastest in UK

Adding Lewisham to the tube map doesn't guarantee regeneration

Housing developers are rushing in on the back of £3.6bn project to make Lewisham part of the Bakerloo line. Will this regenerate the area or is a more holistic approach needed for a lasting impact?

Figure 3

My progress

Choose any three of the ideas you have identified as part of your local media scan.

The three most important themes or local issues for me are:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

Use this box to keep a written record of your sources of information.

Try to evaluate each of your broad themes by thinking about an advantage and disadvantage for each.

Theme 1:

Theme 2:

Theme 3:

You can also refer to the research logs at the end of this workbook (pages 73–77).